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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7282
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

UNCLAS TUNIS 000103

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR EEB/TRA/AN AND NEA/MAG
USDOC FOR ITA/MAC/ONE (MASON)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EIND](#) [EAIR](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: TUNISIA: MINISTER OF TOURISM SETS A DATE FOR OPEN
SKIES

REF: A. TUNIS 40
[1](#)B. 09 TUNIS 829
[1](#)C. 09 TUNIS 827
[1](#)D. 09 TUNIS 696

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) In a February 4 courtesy call, the Ambassador discussed Tunisia's tourism sector with Minister of Tourism Slim Tlatli. Tlatli reported that the Government of Tunisia (GOT) intends to sign an Open Skies agreement with the United States by November 2011. The Ambassador and the Minister also discussed other ways of increasing U.S.-Tunisia links, including the "Memphis in May" festival and the U.S.-Tunisia match-up at the September World Championship games of the International Basketball Federation. End summary.

Plans to Develop the Tourism Sector

[1](#)2. (SBU) Tlatli opened the meeting with an overview of the tourism sector, which represents six percent of GDP and directly employs over 4,000 Tunisians, and outlined the ministry's plans to expand the sector with desert tours, golf courses, thalasso (salt water) therapy, cultural tours, and eco-tourism. His ministry is pursuing a strategy to diversify the tourism sector and increase its profitability by expanding into the high-end market.

A November 2011 Deadline for Open Skies

[1](#)3. (SBU) Following discussions with ministers of transport (ref A), development (ref B), and finance (ref C), the Ambassador raised the possibility of an Open Skies agreement with Tunisia to expand trade and to move beyond the current, relatively low, annual level of 20,000 U.S. visitors. Tlatli said that the GOT had set an internal deadline of November 2011 to sign several aviation agreements, including an Open Skies agreement with the United States. (Note: As reported in ref D, the Embassy sent a model text of an Open Skies agreement to the GOT in September 2009. End note.) Tlatli also said that Tunisia's national carrier, Tunisair, was negotiating a codeshare agreement with Delta Airlines; he said that Delta appeared reluctant to accept a codeshare with Tunisair, preferring to partner with European airlines.

Opportunities for U.S.-Tunisia Cooperation

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador and the minister discussed other opportunities to increase U.S.-Tunisia trade and tourism links, including the "Memphis in May International Festival," which will host a "salute to Tunisia" this year. Tlatli also said that his brother, Adel Tlatli, is the head coach of the Tunisian national basketball team, which will face the U.S. team in Istanbul, Turkey on September 2 at the International Basketball Federation World Championship. Tlatli said that some 17 million U.S. viewers are expected to watch the game on television, and he asked the Ambassador to assist the ministry's request for free airtime for a commercial promoting tourism in Tunisia.

¶5. (SBU) Updated biographic information on Minister Tlatli has been sent to INR/B via email.
GRAY